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ABSTRACT

Teachers need to align learning opportunities with state-mandated objectives. This process should begin with assessing the curriculum, possibly through the use of a 10-point scale by teachers, administrators, support personnel, and parents. To implement the needed learning opportunities, tenets from educational psychology should be used in teaching and learning situations. To determine whether or not a teacher is implementing principles of educational psychology, a Likert scale may be devised to assess the quality of instruction. There are also many procedures available to assess student achievement, ranging from standardized tests to portfolios. (SLD)

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Harmonizing Mandated Standards and Principles of Learning in Psychology (Evaluating Curricular Issues)

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HARMONIZING MANDATED STANDARDS AND PRINCIPLES OF LEARNING IN PSYCHOLOGY

(EVALUATING CURRICULAR ISSUES)

Numerous teachers have indicated how complicated it is to choose learning opportunities which align with state mandated objectives. The mandated objectives are a given and carved in stone. Which difficulties do teachers experience in aligning the chosen learning opportunities with the mandated objectives?

1. A lack of teaching materials to align with the mandated objectives, especially the first school year.
2. Effort that when into finding new teaching materials when quality teaching went on anyway, with the old school district objectives.
3. Uncertainty in teacher feelings to sequence and implement new mandated objectives. Thus, with each new governor of a state came a new set of state mandated "objectives of excellence."
4. Unacceptable pupil test scores from lower socio-economic level pupils at a time when "the gap is to be narrowed or eliminated" in student achievement.
5. Selection of a variety of activities and experiences to motivate and engage students to achieve objectives. It is difficult to help each to achieve when disruptions occur frequently.
6. Assist each student to learn as much as possible. This becomes difficult when the range of achievement from high to low is very great.
7. Changes are made too frequently in developing the curriculum. There needs to be adequate stability for teachers to feel secure with ongoing innovations.
8. Lack of rigorous controls on research conducted. Poor quality research is often etched in stone. A board of review needs to examine all research and pass on those meeting standards of excellence. Research that is of poor quality should not be footnoted in educational literature. Inadequate research lacks random sample techniques, fewness in numbers in the study, measurement techniques lacking in validity and reliability, shortness in duration of the study, and too many extraneous variables in order to draw any viable conclusions. The research results then are not helpful to the teacher in guiding students to achieve objectives.
9. Good mentors are lacking for new teachers. Mentors assisting teachers to achieve objectives need to be in the offing. Each mentor needs to be caring, helpful, polite, skillful, and knowledgeable.

10. Quality in-service/orientation for teachers is not being supplied. In-service education endeavors should be reasonable in terms of spent time, useful to help students achieve objectives, and in good environmental settings for achieving.

By diagnosing deficiencies, the school system may move ahead in remediation to develop quality in teaching and learning situations. Each student may well then achieve more optimally!

Principles of Learning From Educational Psychology

There are definite criteria from educational psychology which need implementation in the curriculum. If a teacher is following these criteria may be assessed on a five point Likert Scale:

1. Provides for the interests of the students. This may be observed and rated by noticing questions and problems identified by students in ongoing lessons and units of study. Also, the degree to which students become actively involved in learning may further reveal student interest.
2. Assists students to perceive purpose for learning. Here, the teacher briefly explains to students the value(s) of achieving each objective prior to their implementation.
3. Engages students in learning. The teacher then needs to assist students to use a hands-on approach in the curriculum.
4. Helps students to use what has been learned. Making application of what has been learned guides students to remember subject matter and skills acquired as well as perceive utilitarian values in teaching and learning situations.
5. Makes learning meaningful. With meaningful learnings, students understand that which has been taught.

Providing for individual differences assists the student to begin in teaching and learning situations where he/she is presently in knowledge and abilities. From that point on, through quality sequencing and scaffolding, the student may reach out to achieve increasingly complex objectives.

There are a plethora of ingredients which must be inherent in the curriculum. State mandated objectives need to harmonize with the principles of learning from educational psychology. Each student needs to achieve as optimally as possible.

ASSESSING ISSUES IN THE CURRICULUM

Schools and school systems need to assess the curriculum frequently in moving from what is to what should be in terms of objectives, learning opportunities and assessment procedures. Studying the curriculum helps to make it relevant for the learners. What is taught needs to be used by students. Each needs to learn as much as possible.

Assessing Curricular Issues

Which areas of the curriculum then need assessment? Teachers, administrators, support personnel, and parents may be involved in developing the research form to be used in needs assessment categories. Each category is vital and should, if implemented, assist students to achieve as optimally as possible. The following are examples of curricular items which might be rated on a ten point scale by respondents:

1. Aligning the local curriculum with state mandated objectives.
2. Having classroom learning activities emphasizing the concrete more so than the abstract in teaching and learning.
3. Stressing a psychological rather than a logical curriculum.
4. Implementing an integrated, rather than a separate subjects curriculum.
5. Incorporating team teaching as compared to the self contained classroom.
6. Using problem solving rather than learning facts in ongoing lessons.
7. Using a variety of evaluation techniques.
8. Emphasizing three kinds of objectives in teaching, namely content, skills, and affective ends of instruction.
9. Using flexible ways of grouping for instruction so that each learner may achieve optimally.
10. Implementing diverse learning styles of students in teaching and learning situations.

Assessing the Quality of Instruction

There are selected criteria which need to be followed in teaching students. The criteria come from educational psychology and include:

1. Developing and maintaining student interests in ongoing lessons and units of study.
2. Stressing purpose or reasons for learning.
3. Emphasizing relevant facts, concepts, and generalizations.

4. Advocating the application of what has been learned by students.

5. Implementing the concept of providing for individual differences so each may achieve optimally.

6. Emphasizing the use of multiple means of assessing student progress.

7. Choosing a student centered approach in teaching and learning situations.

8. Utilizing diverse ways of grouping students for instruction to assist each student to learn as much as possible.

9. Having students reflect upon what has been learned.

10. Helping learners to use what has been achieved.

Assessing Evaluation Techniques

There are numerous procedures available to assess student achievement. The range of procedures may vary from standardized test results to portfolio development. Reasons given for standardized test use are the following:

1. All students receive the same test items, the same directions, the same time limits, and are scored using the same key.

2. A single numeral, such as a percentile, readily indicates how well a student is achieving.

3. The single numeral from test results is easiest for students and parents to understand.

4. Students can be compared in achievement with others in class.

5. Report cards may be issued to show learner achievement, when comparisons are made among schools and school districts.

6. Standardized tests have accompanying manuals conveying information validity, reliability, pilot studies made, and who the students were to standardize the test.

7. Standardized achievement test scores may be divided into different academic areas of the curriculum with a resulting numerical score for each.

Disadvantages for using standardized tests to assess student progress are the following:

1. They are written by outsiders disconnected with the local classroom.

2. They do not provide for developmental differences among students which include diverse abilities, intelligences, speed of responding, and learning styles.

3. They do not have accompanying objectives for teachers to use in gauging teaching of subject matter and skills.

4. They tend to lack validity pertaining to what is taught in a local classroom.

5. They do not stress higher levels of cognition such as critical and creative thinking, as well as problem solving. Rather, multiple choice test items are used, which stress student recall of information.

6. They do not stress functional writing nor oral communication skills in the evaluation process.

7. They test on numbered multiple choice items unrelated to each other.

Weaknesses in standardized testing need to be identified and remedied by those involved in writing and editing test items.

Conclusion

Teachers need to align learning opportunities with state mandated objectives. To implement these learning opportunities, tenets from educational psychology need to be used in teaching and learning situations. To ascertain if a teacher is implementing educational psychology principles, a Likert scale may be devised to assess the quality of instruction.